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SUBJECT: ANALYST DISCUSSES ANTI-JAPANESE SENTIMENT,
REGIONAL INTEGRATION WITH CHINESE SCHOLARS

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Daniel Shields. Reasons 1.
4 (b/d).

Summary

¶1. (C) A visiting American analyst of Asian regional affairs discussed Sino-Japanese relations with four scholars from three different Chinese government think-tanks during his mid-April visit to Beijing, soon after Premier Wen Jiabao's visit to Japan. Scholars felt that key points in the often tense bilateral relationship included the following:

-- Anti-Japanese sentiment in China is rooted in vivid images of Japan's pre-WWII invasion of China, Japanese perceptions that Japan is superior to its Asian neighbors, negative views of Japan instilled in the Chinese educational system and the decline of Japan as a positive economic model.

-- China and Japan are locked in an accusation-denial cycle which makes bilateral relations emotional.

-- Widespread fear of a remilitarized Japan persists in China despite rational arguments to support a greater international role for Japan.

-- Challenges to improving Sino-Japanese relations include Taiwan, Japan's bid for a permanent UNSC seat and the history issue.

-- China is concerned about Japan's participation in potential international efforts to contain China.

-- Bilateral and regional cooperation involving China and Japan could be strengthened, including a greater role for the United States. China claims to follow ASEAN's lead in assessing ASEAN-Plus-Three as the most effective regional architecture. End Summary.

¶2. (C) In mid-April, a visiting analyst of Asian regional affairs discussed anti-Japanese sentiment in China and Japan-China relations with Chinese scholars, soon after Premier Wen Jiabao's visit to Japan. The scholars were Ministry of Foreign Affairs-affiliated China Institute for International Studies (CIIS) Senior Fellow Jin Linbo, Ministry of State Security affiliated-China Institute of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) Institute of Japanese Studies Director Yang Bojiang, China Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) Institute of Japanese Studies Deputy Director Jin Xide and CASS Modern History Chair Bu Ping, who also heads China's delegation to the Joint Sino-Japanese History Dialogue.

Roots of Anti-Japanese Sentiment

13. (C) Before the 1990s, Japan's rapid economic development was heralded as a model to follow in China, but in the past two decades Japan's economic slow down and China's rise has allowed for greater vilification of Japan, said CIIS's Jin. The history of Japan's pre-WWII invasion of China is still vivid, commented CICIR's Yang, noting it is passed down from generation to generation, memorialized in museums and monuments and reenacted in contemporary dramas.

Curriculum Errors of Omission, Not Commission

14. (C) All four scholars agreed with the analyst's suggestion that China's education system has played a role in driving anti-Japanese sentiment. But the scholars attributed any anti-Japanese tendency in China's national curriculum to neglect and failure to update textbooks, not a purposeful campaign of disinformation. The curriculum should be updated to include Japan's post-1960 history of peace, Japan's assistance to Asia and the positive aspects of bilateral relations, CIIS's Jin and CICIR's Yang agreed.

Accusation-Denial Cycle

15. (C) Anti-Japanese sentiment feeds into a vicious cycle of accusation and denial between China and Japan, said Dr. Bu. Japan's perceived "mistakes" in dealing with history or working with Asian neighbors often elicit Chinese demands for an apology, he said. This reinforces Japanese resistance to addressing the past, which further excites Chinese "sensitivities." Bilateral relations are emotional with the

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political effect that China is extremely sensitive to Japan actions, said CASS's Jin. All four scholars agreed that the only way out of this cycle is to increase mutual understanding and trust to make objective mutual assessments.

China must be able to confidently gauge Japan's governmental and political mainstream positions, said CASS's Jin, to successfully moderate its reactions and improve bilateral relations. Bu conceded the process is slow and requires greater support from the government, academia and the business community, including the bilateral exchange of experts on history, for which he is the Chinese chairman.

An Acceptable "Normal" Japan

16. (C) In the context of the ongoing debate over Japan's future political identity, scholars held different views on what constitutes the development of a "normal" Japan acceptable to China. CIIS's Jin said Japan's limited military power is out of balance with its economic influence, leading to tensions internally and in its relations abroad. Developing a competent modern military is natural and not threatening, he added, but cautioned that in China his is a minority view. Scholars agreed that militarist and "unhealthy" ultra-nationalist movements are not mainstream in Japan. CASS's Jin was particularly concerned about Japan's sense of moral superiority and tendency to deny atrocities.

Japan UNSC Seat No-Win for China

17. (C) The Chinese government does not officially oppose Japan's bid for a permanent UNSC seat, but has not yet refined its position, CICIR's Yang and CASS's Jin told the analyst separately. The idea of Japanese permanent membership is so unpalatable to the Chinese public that the government will not express public support for the proposal, Jin added, but an attempt to block the bid would damage China's international reputation, commented Yang. CIIS's Jin

saw a permanent seat as a natural balancing of Japan's economic and political strength.

Challenges: History, Taiwan

¶18. (C) All four scholars viewed the importance of the history topic in bilateral relations differently, but none agreed China was using history as a diplomatic card. Bu, head of China's delegation to the joint history talks, was optimistic that such discussions could improve public perceptions in each country. Scholars on both sides found that their differences were not as great as anticipated. The Chinese were not as rigidly ideological as the Japanese had feared and the Japanese were not all from the extreme right, as the Chinese had feared, Bu said. Bu and CIIS's Jin agreed that broad gains and a narrowing of differences would be achieved, but they saw no grand resolution to bilateral tensions over history. They also agreed that failure to reach consensus would not derail political relations, but a downturn in bilateral relations would bring an end to scholarly dialogue.

CIIS's Jin worried that the Chinese government's unwillingness to compromise was setting China up to lose either way.

¶19. (C) Even if China won all the concessions it demanded, Japan would be alienated in the process, he noted, poisoning the future of bilateral relations. If Japan fails to properly resolve history issues, it will not only offend East Asia, but also the United States, said CASS's Jin. He painted Taiwan as a major challenge in Sino-Japanese relations. Japan especially fears Taiwan's eventual unification with the Mainland, he said, because Japanese fear that this could "choke off Japan's lifeline" for natural resources.

Japan's Role in Containment, China's Rise

¶10. (C) As economic, political and military power in East Asia shifts towards the Mainland, Japan's apprehensions over a rising China have grown, said CIIS's Jin and CASS's Bu. These fears were in some part imported from the United States and Europe, CIIS's Jin added. China's artful use of soft power in the region has enhanced its image and popularity, something decades of Japanese development assistance did not achieve, he said. As PM Abe will likely be in power until 2012, China should take a long-term strategy towards Japan and prepare to work with the Liberal Democratic Party, said

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CICIR's Yang. CASS's Jin was concerned with a growing "policy of containment" towards China. He mentioned Japan's Arc of Freedom and Prosperity and democracy and human rights rhetoric as an attempt to create a values-based alliance with the West, India and Australia. China, Jin said, does not like being targeted by such containment attempts.

Challenges for Regional Integration

¶11. (C) When asked which regional architecture will dominate, CASS's Jin said, and the others agreed, that ASEAN-plus-Three has the best chance to produce results in the short term and is preferred by the majority of ASEAN countries, whose lead China follows. CIIS's Jin said a lack of mutual trust, rapid change and the varied strengths of countries in the region hinder cooperation. Regional relationships are dominated by hedging and small powers playing big powers off against each another, primarily for economic gain, said Dr. Yang. Big powers will form the trunk of the regional cooperation tree, Yang added, but smaller countries must be respected because they will act as buffers reducing friction between larger players.

¶12. (C) CICIR's Yang said the United States could play an

important role in improving the chances for regional cooperation by urging the rise of moderate views within Japan. He suggested establishing a dialogue between China and the United States-Japan alliance as a first step toward broader bilateral cooperation. CASS's Jin saw the United States as a stabilizer and necessary economic partner that could allay fears of others in the region about being dominated by China and/or Japan. Since the United States is not actively participating in current East Asian groupings, such as the East Asian Summit, mutual trust remains low and regional integration elusive, he said.

¶13. (SBU) The delegation cleared this cable.

RANDT